Glimpse Into Babylonia Through Letter Files 4,000 Years Old

Business Men's System of To-day Had Its Counterpart in Ancient Times, Even to a Postal Service Which Permitted Messages to Go Astray—Clay Tablets Deciphered by Archaeologists Throw Light on Everyday Affairs, Customs and Problems of Antiquity—Yale's Wonderful Collection

THE modern, elaborate American filing system had its counterpart in Babylonia 4,000 years ago. The business man of that day caused rough first drafts to be made of the letters he wished his scribes to send out for him, and these copies on unbaked clay tablets were filed away in the man's private records or in the archives of the temple.

When they are found by excavators on the sites of the cities where their inditers once lived they are broken and hard to decipher, with frequent erasures and corrections upon them.

The letter which was despatched by the Babylonian business man was a finished product and was slipped into a neat clay case made to fit it. Loose sand was then shaken in between the

TABLETS SUCH AS WERE USED in ANCIENT CORRESPONDENCE.

letter and the case, so that the writing would not be rubbed off in transit, the flap end of the envelope was sealed and stamped with the impress of the sender's signet ring in hot wax. All this 4,000 years ago!

Unfortunately, copies filed were not protected by envelopes, any more than are our carbon copies of correspondence sent out, and equally unfortunate is it that these files are the clay tablets that come oftenest into possession of the archæologists and must be deciphered by them to throw light on antiquity. The recipient of a letter in Babylonia in 2,000 B. C. read it, answered it, and often threw it away, much as we do to-day. Offices then undoubtedly had waste baskets—strong ones they must have been—into which the letters were tossed and from which they were emptied regularly by the office boy upon a dust heap, where they perished. Rare indeed is the discovery in a museum collection of a tablet letter in its envelope.

Babylon's Own Burleson.

Prof. Henry Frederick Lutz, formerly assistant to Prof. Albert T. Clay, curator of the Yale Babylonian collection, but now connected with the Babylonian section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, shows that finished letters in good condition are hard to find even in so notable an array of clay tablets as the one at Yale. Among 152 official and private letters which he examined recently only three had envelopes and were complete and unbroken.

One of these three Professor Lutz found unopened and its contents obviously unread. He has chosen to leave it sealed because it is a beautiful example of a sealed Babylonian communication and as such makes an interesting exhibit. Neither an ancient nor a modern would reseal a letter that had been opened and read, so the supposition must be that Exhibit No. 6826 is a letter that never reached its destination or was so long in reaching it that the person for whom it was intended was dead ere it arrived. Ancient letters were despatched by couriers; later evidence dug out of the ground points to a postal system in cities as large and important as Larsa, on the site of which all these letters translated by Lutz have (as far as is known) been uncovered. This evidence of an undelivered letter leads us to infer that Babylonia, too, had its Burleson! But the Babylonian Burleson had a better excuse when the mails were slow. Wars and invasions came unheralded then by more than a matter of hours. Letter carriers and postal clerks flew to arms and left such trifles as the delivery of ordinary letters in abeyance.

Another such an unopened and undelivered letter was found in the Babylonian archives of the University of Pennsylvania Museum and duly chronicled in THE SUN two or three years ago.

Larsa of 4,000 Years Ago.

Most of these letters deciphered by Prof. Lutz do not turn up fresh ground, nor do they make signal additions to data already obtained concerning legal and business documents previously deciphered. Evidence places them as belonging to Larsa, as has been said—that important city of ancient Babylonia, site of the worship of the sun god Shamash, and the biblican Ellasar of Genesis xiv., 1; all were written about 2000 B. C., the classical age of Babylonian history.

They are important to scholars as verifying discoveries made by other Assyriologists, thereby adding to the sum total of accumulated records from which the savants may formulate a basis on which dates can be fixed, customs determined and from which personages really historical but now seemingly mythical from the dearth of proof of them can be fitted into logical sequence of reigns.

But some facts uncovered by Prof. Lutz in these redactions which are far from unknown to his fellow archaeologists are new and correspondingly engrossing to the public in their psuedo familiarity. Others startle us with their "progress."

Letter No. 92 in the collection points to an apparently established custom in Babylonia that is to-day only one of many revolutionary changes that are just beginning to operate in industry here, to wit, that of profit sharing with employees. The agent of a rich man has written in No. 92 addressing the servants of his lord as to their portion of the year's profits. Only the bricklayers—for what reason is not made clear—have had their participation withheld from them. "Come up and your case, which you have, establish before the servants of the King," the writer admonishes them.

Larsa may have had its Soviet and its Bolsheviki, and tablets of them have not yet come to light!

Dawn of Labor's Rights.

This is the earliest instance in which labor is spoken of as having a definite status. That is, 4,000 years ago labor was invited to lay its case before capital or before the Government which controlled capital.

Priority of shipments of essentials in war time was not strange to the ancients. Another epistle from an officer of the Babylonian army to the commissary department is plainly marked "rush." It demands grain for the fighting troops and warns "Do not withhold it!"

Mothers-in-law were in evidence. A lawsuit pertaining to a dowry is the subject of another communication, and mother-in-law seems to have held the winning cards. The writer in reporting the results of the action, presumably to the plaintiff's lawyers, says, "We have examined their case. Judgment according to the law of our Lord we have rendered them. The entire dowry which Mattatum gave to her daughter when she brought her to the house of Ilushu-Ibishu we have said must revert to Mattatum. We despatch a sheriff to her. Let them give unto Mattatum everything in such good condition as is now beheld."

The Babylonian law was explicit as to dowries. A husband was entitled to certain commodities with his bride, and the bride's father (or mother, as the case might be) had to give them to him. But if the marriage turned out unhappily the wife could return with her dowry to her father's (or mother's) house. This lawsuit demonstrates that it was sometimes necessary to fight to enforce the law—and Mattatum won.

Phases From Correspondence.

Previous light thrown on Babylonian court affairs has denoted that women always received equal justice with men. "Babylonia had equal laws for men and women, and equal rights." But there are instances of chivalry toward women before the bar of justice; occasionally, as here, seeming partiality is shown one. However, there is nothing in the old tablets found so far to show that Babylonia was ahead of Nassau county.

The Babylonian business man was polite and ceremonious when he wrote "Yours received and contents duly noted." Thus he unburdens himself:

"May Shamash and Marduk preserve your life!

"Concerning that which you wrote: 'Send for thy brother so that he may assist thee' and 'a man has destroyed the vessels of the temple and I took one shekel of silver by robbery.' I reply as follows: 'I have taken notice. That grain is not in my field.

"'Send me 60 *qa* of flour.

"'(Regarding) my garments, which are with you, I come continually with my request: Send me one robe! Do not be negligent toward me! You have always another excuse . . .'" The peevish note has cropped up in other letters found on old baked clay tablets. Apparently, Ibiq-nar-kimbi, who wrote the above, was related to his correspondent. Family life has not changed in thousands of years!

Another letter records a lawsuit, the action of an individual versus the State. This is the first trace of a legal action in which the State is the defendant.

New Biblical Lore.

Biblical students look to the archæologists for new light on Old Testament lore whenever another batch of ancient tablets are deciphered and they are seldom disappointed. The most important find to Biblical readers in these latest translations of Prof. Lutz is his discovery of the name of Abraham in its full form in cuneiform for the first time. It occurs in the course of a friendly letter and was "written in the era of the patriarch," says Prof. Clay.

Prof. Ungnad of Gena found ancient Babylonian forms of the name some time ago, written A-ba-ra-ma, A-ba-am-ra-ra, and A-ba-am-ra-am, which he regarded as exact reproductions of the patriarch's name in Babylonian and derived from the Semitic stem *ramu*. Prof. Lutz and Prof. Clay share the conviction that Abraham is wholly of Semitic origin.

This Abraham's father was Anvil-Ishtar, a good Babylonian name Ungnad points out, so Abraham must be Babylonian too. Lutz does not agree and points to names of fathers and sons in the Murashu business documents deciphered by Prof. Clay. In them, fathers with good Babylonian names have sons who bear West Semitic names. This, says Lutz, "points to mixed marriages, or it shows that the Jews in Babylonia actually adopted Babylonian names and later their sons were given names from the West Semitic home"—perhaps by sentimental mothers?

If the archives of the present day in New York city were to be deciphered by some one four thousand years hence who had sparse historical data to work from, what discussions would arise over the probable derivation of the names found there! Few children of certain branches of the Semitic race to-day bear the unadulterated names of their fathers, but their offspring are often endowed with the first name of a grandfather purely for sentiment's sake.

And New York is such a polyglot array that the delvers in A. D. 5919 would have more than the Semitic names to ponder over!

Every Day Matters.

Among the wealth of other documents translated by Prof. Lutz many have to do with homely, every day matters such as the sale of slaves, the purchase of wedding presents, the exchange of prisoners of war. These ancients were always at war, so one may fittingly call exchange of prisoners of war an every day matter. Hummurabi's name is often seen, attesting to the universal acceptance of his laws.

Prof. Ettalene Mears Grice of the Yale Babylonian Seminary, one of the first women archaeologists who have arisen to take the place of those several promising young research workers who fell in Britain's army during the first years of the war—young Guy Dickens was among them and his was an irretrievable loss in the Grecian field of excavation and study—has deciphered and published a large collection of records from Ur and Larsa, as represented in the Yale Museum. Like Prof. Lutz, her work is chiefly important in confirming and verifying claims already made by Assyriologists at work on other tablets in other collections.

Two types of business documents appear in her translations—legal contracts and chronicles of purely temple transactions. The latter range from brief notes of direction as to sales, purchases, &c., to elaborate inventories of temple stock. The contracts include deeds for lands and houses and promissory notes. The temple records include receipts for payments and rents from temple property and deal in wholesale terms of wool, gold, silver, grain, bitumen and what not.

Children's Copy Books.

She has deciphered exercise tablets, proving the existence of a temple school at Ur as well as at Nippur. Yale's collection of exercise slates from Larsa have already proved the existence of a school there. "It seems likely," adds Prof. Grice, "that there were schools in connection with all the principal temples in Babylonia," a deduction shared with her by most research workers in this field.

Several different standard weights and measures are mentioned in the temple archives, but we know now beyond doubt that the Babylonians and the Sumerian-Akkadians had tables of weights and measures, and that they taught them in their schools, and accumulated evidence on that point has ceased to surprise us. Miss Grice has found another spelling book and a child's spelling lesson, much corrected, this one being of the names of cities. She instances the presence of ditto marks on temple lists, three years ago, Prof. Clay made first three years ago, when he brought to light a bilingual dictionary in the Sumerian and Babylonian languages. The ditto marks were there used exactly as we would have used them; when the second and succeeding lines had the same form as the word on the first line these "check marks," as Miss Grice terms them, were placed to denote that.

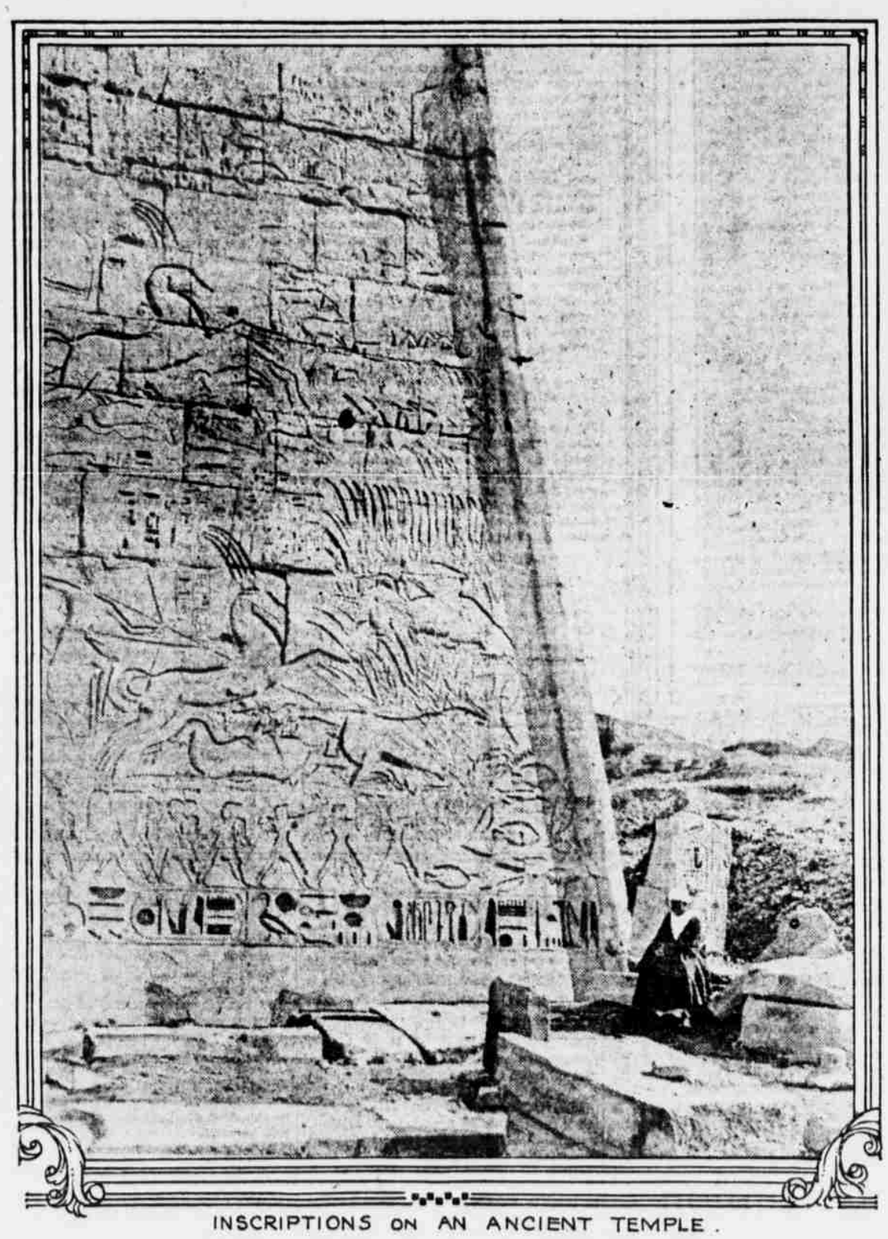
In the Grice redactions we are introduced to Balmunamhe, the Rockefeller of Larsa in 2000 B. C. The number and character of the references to him on the Yale texts from this district mark him as a prominent business man; perhaps the most prominent one of his time. Indubitably his private muniments have been dug up by the Arabs and sold by them to merchants who deal with archæologists, and much gratitude is due the diggers. Balmunamde was a busy little man. He appears in Yale documents not only as a witness but as an active party in a wide range of transactions. He is a purchaser of land and houses and slaves; he frequently sells all three and at no small figures. He lends grain and silver and demands gold from his debtors; he is an official on occasion; he files tax receipts on his great array of properties.

Nor were his energies confined to a few years. They cover a period extending over a decade—from the reign of Warad-Sin and throughout the reign of Rim-Sin, the latest about him to be deciphered belonging to the forty-second year of Hammurabi. Throughout these years his scribes kept lists of his employees and their wages—payrolls that only a rich man could have met.

Several fragments in the Yale collection have been invaluable in filling out other and (presumably) more important possessions of other museums, notably the Louvre prism. Prof. Grice speaks of two Yale tablets which adequately cover a period of nine years whose chronicles have been broken off from the Louvre prism of Larsan kings and their dates.

In his Revue d'Assyriologie for 1918 Prof. Thureau-Dangin published the inscription of a four sided prism which, if uninjured, would have yielded a complete chronicle of the Larsa dynasty. The lengths of the reigns of the first four kings are broken from the prism, but can be supplied from tablets found in the Yale collection. Beginning with the fifth king, the Louvre prism gives the formula for each year to the reign of Rim-Sin. The second face of the prism is entirely destroyed and a gap of fifty-four years in the chronology lost. This gap must be restored from finds in other tablets. In all twenty-nine of the missing years have already been restored, some of them tentatively from published texts or from new formulæ unearthed upon Yale tablets.

AN ARCHEOLOGICAL PARTY *at* WORK.



INSCRIPTIONS ON AN ANCIENT TEMPLE.

The importance of the Babylonian collection at Yale University and the rapid development of the Babylonian Seminary under Dr. Albert T. Clay's able direction cannot be overestimated. For a number of years Yale paid scant heed to several large Assyrian slabs of bas relief and to bricks on exhibition in her old library building. They might or might not be valuable. With the coming of Dr. Clay as curator tireless effort was begun to decipher and place these historically and to add to them by a wide and judicious purchase of other tablets and relics of ancient Babylonia and Akkadia-Sumeria.

Yale has had great good fortune in her purchases. Indeed, she has often done better than those universities that have maintained expeditions upon the sites of buried cities. She has added to her treasures until to-day the Yale collection numbers more than 10,000 baked clay tablets, as well as a weight of replicas of important monuments and relics found in other museums. Five years ago the collection was moved into a building at Yale dedicated to its preservation, but that building is already too small for it and Yale will shortly set about raising money to erect a museum worthy of this accumulation of Semitic and pre-Semitic antiquities.

Before the war Yale had the third largest store of important Babylonian tablets, Oxford having of course the largest and the University of Pennsylvania museum the second largest collection in the world. Yale may be said now to surpass the University of Pennsylvania museum. With the dearth of human material in Europe due to the loss of young archæologists on the battlefields and with "tight" money in European countries Yale may conceivably forge ahead of Oxford, for a time at least, in the field of Assyriology.

Prof. Clay and his associates have spent the last four years in deciphering and redacting, and the Yale University Press is groaning under series of important publications that the cessation of hostilities in Europe will release for front page newspaper reading. It will take yeears, however, for them to give to the world the full facts gleaned from all the tablets upon which Yale's scholars are working, and as Dr. Clay is getting more and more tablets into his possession all the time, the end of his research work is not in sight.

But every line of it will add to the sum total of our knowledge of the civilization that antedated the Old Testament by two, three and five thousand years.

In the *Empire of the Amorites*, which Prof. Clay will bring out shortly, he has taken his place with Sayce and Wright in bringing to the attention of those interested in ancient history a forgotten empire. Forty years ago Sayce and Wright introduced us to the Hittites, a people who came before 2000 B. C. Prof. Clay has amassed facts from tablets and monuments of another nearly forgotten empire which exerted a powerful influence upon its surrounding nations. *Amurru* belonged to the period just prior to the ascendency of the Hittites.

To Biblical lovers, his deductions are interesting as showing that the religion and culture of Israel are not of Babylonian origin. Israel developed naturally within herself from an earlier and indigenous civilization, the civilization of *Amurru*. The Amorites carried their culture into Babylonia, it is true, but Prof. Clay proves conclusively that the Semites of the Old Testament did not derive their civilization from Amoritic strains absorbed by them in Babylonia. The strain came to them directly from *Amurru*, long before the Babylonian exile.

The Old Days in Chinatown

OUR newer Chinese restaurants are more American than Oriental. They are white tiled, well lighted and often charmingly decorated with native prints. You will find the modern wash bowl, cash register and cigar stand. The phonograph has replaced the native orchestra. In place of the bare pearl inlaid tables and hard wooden benches we have white linen covers and cane bottom chairs. Few of us Americans request chop sticks to eat with; in our youth there was nothing else to be had. We know their kitchen is 100 per cent. perfect because their bill of fare tells us so, kindly signed by the local health inspector. We have Chinese dishes yet American food.

You will be seated by a pleasant faced Chinaman who is thoroughly American in speech and dress. It was not so in the old days.

In 1885 Hon Low, in partnership with old Sah Lee, opened the Orange Blossom, a glittering little Canton café in the heart of Chinatown. The restaurant, which was on the second floor of a four story building, had a balcony extending across its front. Chinese lanterns were suspended in reckless profusion from every point. A flight of stairs ascended from the street and led to a narrow landing from which opened the café. On the ground glass door at the entrance was painted a branch of orange blossoms, over which was the inscription, "Cam Ghet."

The café was a large, high studded room, divided in the middle by an elaborate screen of wood, which was pierced by two arches. The arches supported a carved and gilded panel representing scenes of Oriental life. A show case containing many pieces of beautiful embroidery was at the right of the entrance. Behind the case hung three tapestries, each depicting a lovely Chinese maiden, woven in threads of gold. Beyond the tapestries two small arches—similar to those which divided the room—opened into a space from which all the food was served.

Sah Lee's Service and Music.

At 10:30 P. M. the Cam Ghet was almost deserted, but gradually the place began to fill up. At a table in the alcove near one of the windows a couple had taken seats. Already old Sah Lee—who always considered "the service" to be the most important part of his business—was pattering back and forth from his customers to the cook room. Five chinamen, composing a string band, shuffled across the room and seated themselves on the couch in the alcove.

The leader of the band—who was also the time marker—sat at the head of the cot and played a cracked drum with two sticks. The next man had a long handled, three stringed banjo, the double head of which was made of snake skins. The third musician had a moon banjo. The next man had a squeaky two stringed fiddle, shaped like a hammer and played upon with a bow of horse hair. The fifth man had an alto violin, shaped like a wooden mallet, played in the same manner as the squeaky fiddle.

At a given word from the leader they began to play a queer composition, at the same time chanting the melody. As these Oriental strains filled the air a steady stream of theatre folk began to pour through the entrance. Groups of students with girls, military men accompanying handsome women and an old man and his grandson. Soon every stool was taken. Chinese waiters glided back and forth, bawling out their orders to the cook in the kitchen at the further end of the room. One not understanding their habits might fancy they were calling to their partners to come and fight the patrons.

At a centre table, chatting a mocking gibberish that sounded like Chinese, was a group of college students enjoying their dishes of suey and rice. Seated near one of the windows was the old gentleman teaching the boy how to use chop sticks. More expert with the sticks than the boy were four Chinamen who sat near them, all eating out of a single platter. The merry laughter of the girls, the guffaws of the students, the weird tin pan music of the orchestra, the chatter and hum of conversation, were momentarily hushed when a messenger boy darted into the cafe and shaking a telegram aloft cried, "Is Henry Dixey in the room?" Again the guests resumed their noise and bustle. Peculiar odors filled the room. Such relished dainties as "wong ye too" (sturgeon head) at $2 a plate, and "park nor mi" (white rice liquor) at 25 cents a cup were in great demand. There was a peculiar atmosphere of abandonment such as could be enjoyed in no other place in the world. One by one the tables were vacated. Hon Low stood bowing near the door and bade every departing guest "good night."

After the Rush, Fan-tan.

When the last couple had gone the door was locked and barred. Several servants emerged from the cook room, swept and washed the floor. Then old Sah Lee brought out a fan-tan outfit and arranged it in the centre of the room. A boy hung three large sheets over the tapestries, for all colors are carefully avoided where fan-tan is played. White, the symbol of mourning, is associated with the idea of losing money and is believed to bring ill fortune to the patrons, with corresponding gains to the house.

The waiters, cooks and other servants, accompanied by Hon Low mounted the stools around the table and the play began. Occasionally a gentle tapping was heard at the outer door, after which several Chinamen were admitted to the room. Taking a few high wooden stools they too joined the game. In the centre of the table was a square called the "t an ching" or "spreading out a square," which consists of a piece of tin with its sides numbered from 1 to 4.

Hon Low, the proprietor, stood on the highest stool. Opposite Hon Low was Sah Lee, now called the "ho kim"—the cashier. Hon Low took a handful of bright brass "cash" from a pile before him, joyously exclaiming, "Mot han La!" (The game is now open; come in and play). He covered the coins with a shallow brass cup called the "tan k'oi," or "spreading cover," and rapped it repeatedly on the top with his knuckles. The players became intensely interested and laid their wagers on the numbers they selected. Hon Low raised the cover and carefully counted off the "cash" in fours, one at a time, not touching them with his hands, but using for the purpose a short tapering rod of black wood. The operation was conducted in silence. When the result was apparent Hon Low mechanically replaced the separated "cash" into the large pile.

After the game had continued about half an hour Hon Low had lost so much money that he made a settlement with the others. Then two of the players were permitted to take the table and run the game for their own profit, paying a small rental to Hon Low and a fee to Sah Lee for his services as cashier. The two men selected to continue the game mounted the higher stools and cried "Mot han La!" The game was open. If impulsive players in their haste placed their money on the wrong square it was all the same, the cashier scooped it in and paid the winner from the box of money beside him. At times a player's hand encountered another's as he laid his stakes on the table. So superstitious was he at this incident that he would not put the money on the number toward which he had been reaching.

Hon Low was quite superstitious also, when he was running the game, for now and then he threw a tiny bit of orange peel into the box which held the winning—for the purpose of purification, he explained, but really to bring good luck to the house. The game continued for about two hours. It was stopped by Hon Low, who then provided supper for the players. All ate what they wished. They did not address one another, eating the meal in silence. The supper finished, the Chinamen departed; visitors, servants, cooks, musicians and waiters. Only old Sah Lee remained.

Again he barred the door. Humming a weird strain he quietly put out the lights in all the lanterns but one. Under this particular one, which hung in the alcove, he arranged a metal lamp and cup. Into the latter he put bits of orange and orange peel, after he had first squeezed the juice into a bowl. He hung the cup on a wire rod over the lamp, and soon fragrant fumes of burning orange filled the room. Turning out the only lantern now left burning he proceeded to scatter about bits of the burnt orange as a rite of purification. Quietly he dipped the tips of his fingers in the orange juice, and touched them to his eyes and forehead. With a mumbled prayer he reverently placed a bit of the charred orange peel to his lips, and dropped it back into the cup.

Old Sah Lee commenced again his feeble, tuneless humming, cast aside his purple jacket, and lay down upon the couch. The tranquillity of night enveloped the enchanted room. Fitful gleams from an arc light outside the window fell across the kind and peaceful face of one thrifty, slumbering Celestial.